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The Rocket Range on Wheels … NASA Wallops Answers the Call

Most rocket launches are conducted at established launch facilities that are fully equipped with radars, control facilities and other support equipment. But what do you do if the range is not fully equipped or the mission needs to be conducted where there is no existing launch range?

For more than 30 years the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center's Wallops Flight Facility, Wallops Island, Va., has answered the call with its mobile range to support rocket launches around the world for government and commercial organizations.

Jack Vieira, Wallops range support manager, said "The Wallops mobile range capabilities are unique not only within NASA but throughout the world. We have available the needed tracking equipment for most any type of rocket launch. We have even supported the smaller suborbital rocket missions with launch rails and pads."

Wallops has provided its mobile range capabilities to support sounding rocket and orbital rocket launches at sites that include the Canary Islands, Puerto Rico, Australia, Greenland, Brazil, Peru and even an aircraft carrier off the coast of Ecuador.

The Wallops mobile range is in action again by supporting the late summer launch of the Lockheed Martin Athena 1 vehicle carrying NASA and Department of Defense satellites. The launch will be from the Kodiak Launch Complex (KLC) on Kodiak Island, Alaska.

For this mission NASA Wallops will be providing an array of tracking equipment and support vans that will be located at Kodiak and the town of Cordova, on the Alaskan mainland just north of Kodiak Island. Wallops support will include range safety, radar tracking and telemetry.

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Pat Ladner, Executive Director of the Alaska Aerospace Development Corporation (AADC), said “The Wallops range safety support has a reputation for being second to none. AADC is proud to have Wallops supporting the first orbital launch from the KLC.”

Vieira said, “Planning and testing has been ongoing at Wallops for more than a year to support the Athena launch. Testing of the equipment at Wallops has been intensive for the last five months.”

At Kodiak, Wallops is providing an 8-foot diameter radar system, 10-foot and 18-foot diameter telemetry antennas and vans, a power van, and a Mobile Command Range System van. At Cordova, Wallops will provide an11-foot diameter radar, a 27-foot diameter telemetry antenna and support van, a mobile command van, and a power van.

“In addition to the myriad of equipment, Wallops will be supplying 33 personnel to support the mission,” said Vieira, a veteran of two mobile campaigns.

The equipment and Wallops personnel will arrive at their respective sites by mid-July to support the targeted August 31 launch.

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